

# Devotionals for Holy Week



*Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.*

*Wayside Presbyterian Church (PCA)*

## Sunday

### The Triumphal Entry

**Reading:** Zechariah 9:9-17; John 12:12-36

**Meditation:** The activity in Jerusalem surrounding Christ's triumphal entry was truly energizing. People longingly expected the Messiah to come and rescue them from political tyranny. Jesus' entrance into the city on a donkey only heightened such expectation, for Zechariah prophesied the King of Israel would come to them on the foal of a donkey bringing with him salvation for the daughter of Jerusalem. Israel appeared ready to accept Jesus. Their acceptance, however, was on their terms. Jesus had indeed come to bring salvation, but not by means of political overthrow. Rather, he would overthrow Satan, sin, and death by means of laying down his life.

Jesus entered the city conscious that his hour had come (John 12:23). This hour represented the reason he had come into the world. He came for this moment; he came to die. All Jesus did in his earthly existence was done in preparation for his death. If we were to know the hour of our death, along with the where and how of it, we would naturally recoil and do all we could to avoid everything associated with it. Yet, Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem, knowing his mission clearly and fully.

The resolve of Jesus on this day does not suggest that he was unaware of what he was to do and accomplish. His soul was exceedingly troubled (John 12:27). The word *troubled* signifies horror and agitation. In the face of such horror, Jesus does not ask to be saved from this hour. Rather, he prays to his Father to glorify his name. What resolve and obedience we see in our Savior, who walked the path of suffering, shame, and abandonment that we might know salvation.

When the crowds surrounding Jesus realized he would not be the kind of king they imagined, they turned on him and abandoned him. Jesus, however, refused to turn his face away from the hour for which he came. In not turning away from his mission we enjoy the prospect of never being turned away by our Savior! What a truly glorious king we serve. He refused to domesticate his mission by overthrowing Caesar for a season. Instead, He overthrew Satan, sin, and death for all eternity!

**Prayer:** Everlasting Creator-Father, Thou hast devised means to rescue me from sin's perdition, to restore me to happiness, honor, safety. I bless thee for the everlasting covenant, for the appointment of a Mediator. I rejoice that he failed not, nor was discouraged, but accomplished the work thou gavest him to do; and said on the cross, 'It is finished.' Lord, grant that my religion may not be occasional and partial, but universal, influential, and effective, so that I may reach my end in peace (*Valley of Vision*).

## Monday

### Jesus Cleanses the Temple

**Reading:** Isaiah 56:1-8; Mark 11:15-19

**Meditation:** Jesus returned to Jerusalem Monday morning after spending the evening in Bethany. When He arrived in Jerusalem he entered the temple and began to drive out those who turned God's house into a den of thieves. In doing so, Jesus intensified the conflict between the religious leaders and himself. The chief priests and scribes, who were profiting from the exploitation of the poor, were filled with fear and with hatred. They began to seek ways to destroy Jesus.

Jesus taught all those outside the temple from Isaiah 56. His words carry a stinging rebuke to those who seek their own profit by corrupting God's house and corrupting true worship. Not only were the merchants and money-changers abusing God's house, they were abusing God's people. Monday's events demonstrate that Jesus was indeed the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The Messiah would come and cleanse God's house from the abuses of wicked religious leaders. In doing so, Jesus set in motion the events that would

lead to his death. The religious leaders did not like their power and authority questioned or threatened. Jesus demonstrated an authority greater than theirs. And they hated him for it.

But Jesus' words also communicated promise and hope. In rebuking the Jewish leaders, He also promised salvation to the nations. God's house was not going to be a peculiarly Jewish entity. In fact, Jesus showed himself to be the greater Temple, and He was for all peoples. All the nations can come to Jesus and experience salvation and access to God. It was a rebuke for those who cultivated self-made religion and rested in their own nationalistic pride. At the same time, it is a message of hope to all who trust in Jesus alone. As Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2, when Jesus died he broke down the dividing wall as the one hope for all nations. We rejoice because Christ rescues us from our pride and changes our boasting from self-glory to glorying in the cross.

**Prayer:** Merciful Lord, let not pride swell my heart. Whatever difference of form and intellect is mine is a free grant of thy goodness. Help me to see myself in thy sight, then pride must wither, decay, die, and perish. Humble my heart before thee, and replenish it with thy choicest gifts. Help me to stand with a wary eye on the watch-tower of faith, and to cling with determined grasp to my humble Lord; if I fall let me hide myself in my Redeemer's righteousness, Amen (*Valley of Vision*).

## Tuesday

### A Lesson about Faith from a Fig Tree

**Reading:** Jeremiah 8:13; Mark 11:20-33

**Meditation:** Mark tells us that Jesus and the Twelve passed by a fig tree on Monday morning (11:12-14). When Jesus saw that the fig tree had no fruit he cursed it. The next day they passed the tree again on their return to Jerusalem and Peter remarked, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." Jesus' reply seems at first glance to be quite random. He responded to Peter's observation, "Have faith in God."

What does all this mean? The fig tree was a familiar symbol for Israel in the Old Testament. The fig tree that Jesus and his disciples came upon appeared lively and covered in leaves. The problem was that it contained no fruit. So it was with Israel. Israel maintained all the appearance of worship with their elaborate Temple, yet there was no fruit. They followed their own understanding of the Law, yet there was no genuine fruit. Looking good and appearing religious matters little before God if there is no life.

Seeing Christ curse the fig tree would have been deeply shocking to the disciples. Within the framework of the symbolism, observing Israel cursed for their lack of fruit would have been troubling and discouraging. What hope do we have in the context of the cursed fig tree? Jesus tells us to have faith in God. This is the necessity for genuine spiritual life.

Those who have faith in God will experience the power of God in their life. This power is Christ's ability to transform us and work in us the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The root cause of Israel's lack of fruit was their lack of belief. They did not accept Jesus as the Messiah sent from God. We, however, may experience real transformation by Christ's atoning work and exhibit fruit that is pleasing to God. Christ took the curse for us that we might bear fruit.

**Prayer:** O God the Holy Spirit, brighten my soul with the pure light of truth; make it fragrant as the garden of paradise, rich with every goodly fruit, beautiful with heavenly grace, radiant with rays of divine light. Be my comforter, light, guide, and sanctifier. Through thee may I learn daily more of Christ's love, grace, compassion, faithfulness, and beauty. Lead me to the cross and show me his wounds, the nature of evil, the power of Satan; may I see there my sins as the nails that transfixed him, the cords that bound him, the thorns that tore him, and the sword that pierced him. And help me to find in his death the reality and immensity of his love. Open for me the wondrous volumes of truth in his, 'It is finished.' Amen (*Valley of Vision*).

## Wednesday

### The Plot to Kill Jesus

**Reading:** Matthew 26:1-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2

**Meditation:** Jesus continued to teach in the Temple on Wednesday, just as He had done Monday and Tuesday. This day, however, there did not appear to be any scandalous controversies as in the previous days. Notwithstanding the relative and comparative peace, the day was not without intrigue. The religious leaders - the chief priests, scribes, and elders - met secretly in the house of Caiaphas the high priest.

The events of Sunday through Tuesday highlight the work of Christ as King and Prophet. The clandestine meeting at the high priest's house to plot Christ's death draws our attention to His work as Priest. Our focus is drawn to two important points. The first is the deliberate and secretive plan to kill Jesus. The hatred of Jesus by the religious leaders had reached a breaking point. Despite all their knowledge of the Old Testament, they rejected Christ to the point of murder. We see here the odiousness and hardness of sin.

The second point we see here is that God overrules even the plans of wicked men. Mark mentions their desire to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. They thought it best to wait until the Feast of Passover was over and the multitudes returned to their homes. They desired to prevent an uproar among the masses during the feast. But they could not control the circumstances. Christ's hour was already set in motion. As they were meeting in the High Priest's house, Jesus and the Twelve were in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper (Mark 14:3-9). This was the scene that compelled Judas to look for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

Further, Christ's death would take place with the greatest number of people in Jerusalem. And it would take place on the Passover, for Christ is the True Passover. We see in this way that Jesus did not die a hapless victim of the devilish plans of scribes and priests. Rather, He died according to the plan set before the foundation of the world. There on the cross Jesus exercised the office of Prophet by revealing the Father's justice and mercy, the office of King by defeating His and our enemies, and the office of Priest by making himself a sacrifice for our sins. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

**Prayer:** Eternal God and Everlasting Father, I exult in the thought that thy justice is satisfied, thy truth established, thy law magnified, and a foundation is laid for my hope. I look to a present and personal interest in Christ and say, 'Surely he has borne my griefs, carried my sorrows, won my peace, and healed my soul.' I praise you, O God, that justified by his blood I am saved by his life. Amen (*Valley of Vision*).

## Thursday

### The Farewell Discourse

**Reading:** John 13-17

**Meditation:** John's account of Christ's passion week comes almost to a halt when recording the events of Thursday. Chapters 13-17 (almost  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the Gospel) recount the activities of Christ's last day before crucifixion. It is in these chapters that John gives us a window into the loving heart of our Savior. Jesus knew His hour had come to depart from this world by means of the cross. He did not shrink back from death, but loved His sheep to the end.

Each chapter of Christ's Farewell Discourse contains enough to meditate upon for the remainder of our days. Only a cursory survey will suffice. The disciples were bickering with each other over who would be the greatest. Jesus quietly reaches for a basin of water and washes the disciples' feet. This act of

humiliation was a lesson and a picture. A lesson that if our Savior humbled Himself, so we ought to live humbly. We are not greater than our Master. It pictures that great work of humiliation that would take place the following day as Jesus would lay down His life for our sins.

Also in that Upper Room, Jesus announced one would betray Him, one would deny Him, and He would leave them to return to His Father. Confusion, sadness, misunderstanding, fear, and anxiety would fill their hearts. And to this, Jesus says, 'Let not your hearts be troubled.' He reminds them that He will not abandon them forever, but will return and take them to be with Him where He is. In the intervening time, He will send His Spirit so they might all know and experience His presence. Jesus, conscious of His own death, put everything in order for the well-being of His sheep. What a great and selfless Shepherd!

He gave them a new commandment, "that you love one another: just as I have loved you." This is how all the world will know that you are Christ's disciple. Of the world, He said it will hate you. In the context of Christ's departure, the Spirit's presence, mutual love of one another, and a hating world, Jesus says, my peace I give to you. He gives His peace to us because He gives Himself to us. He is the vine, we are the branches. We live because we live in union with Him. He then prays. He prays, first for Himself, then for His disciples, and lastly, for you. Whatever befalls you in this world, take heart, Jesus has overcome the world.

**Prayer:** My Father, my Savior wept that all tears might be wiped from my eyes, groaned that I might have endless song, endured pain that I might have unfading health, bore a thorny crown that I might have a glorious crown, bowed his head that I might uplift mine, closed his eyes in death that I might gaze on unclouded brightness, expired that I might forever live. Jesus, thank you (*Valley of Vision*).

## Friday

### The Crucifixion

**Reading:** John 19

**Meditation:** The eternal Son of God in the flesh, beaten. Pilate flogged him to pacify a manipulative crowd and salvage his own political career. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and pushed it down upon the Messiah's head, making sport of the Son of God. The King's crown was the symbol of the curse. Image bearers mocked and taunted the Image of the Invisible God. All of this upon the One who is truly holy, blameless, spotless, and without blemish. We behold amazing love on Calvary's hill!

Darkness covered the land at noon. Behind the blanket of an extinguished sun, the Father bruised His Son. For you, for me, Christ died to set us free. The agony unbearable, His humanity upheld by His deity. Arms outstretched, He bore the weight of sin. Sin committed against Him. For you, for me. Your sin and mine. The unmitigated wrath of a holy and just God unleashed on the Son of His love. The free forgiveness of an infinitely loving and merciful God given to you for the sake of His Son.

'It is finished.' The hour had come. The work was done. The Savior accomplished the mission He was sent to do. 'It is finished.' There is no more to be done. He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. Then they pierced Him. At once there came blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness. His testimony is true. That you may believe.

The Sustainer of all life laid down His own. He was buried. They placed Him in a tomb in a garden. And Joseph rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. There He lay. For you, for me.

**Prayer:** Upon a life I did not live, upon a death I did not die, another's life, another's death, I stake my whole eternity (*Horatius Bonar*).

## Saturday

### A Day of Sadness and Fear

**Reading:** Matthew 27:62-66

**Meditation:** Only Matthew records Saturday's events. The chief priests and Pharisees met with Pilate to request guards at the tomb because they were afraid. They could not erase Jesus' words of resurrection from their minds. The disciples, too, were afraid. Even Sunday evening they were still hiding behind locked doors. Their Master was in a tomb. Their hopes appeared to vanish away like a breath. The emotions, fears, anxieties seem unimaginable. They did not know what God was doing. But God knew where they were and what He was doing. Even in the darkness of confusion, we can trust in a God who is sovereign and in control.

**Prayer:** Sovereign Commander of the Universe, I am sadly harassed by doubts, fears, unbelief, in a felt spiritual darkness. My heavenly Pilot has disappeared, and I have lost the Rock of Ages. Help me, O Lord, to throw myself absolutely and wholly on thee, for better, for worse, without comfort, and all but hopeless. Give me peace of soul, confidence, enlargement of mind, morning joy that comes after night heaviness. Amen (*Valley of Vision*).

## Sunday

### The Day Everything Changed

**Reading:** Matthew 28:1-7; Mark 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-7; John 20:1-10

**Meditation:** All the sorrow and hopelessness and sadness of Saturday reversed on Sunday. The most startling words rang forth from the angel, "He is not here, for he has risen, just as he said." Jesus is alive. He conquered Satan, death, and sin. The Son of God incarnate was raised in victory and breaks into time and inaugurates for His people a new age. He is the first-fruits of resurrection, guaranteeing that you, too, will be raised in triumph and glory. Each Sunday is an Easter Sunday. We worship because Jesus is true and Jesus is alive. May you worship today with joy because Jesus lives and reigns.

**Prayer:** O God of my Exodus, Jesus strides forth as the victor, conqueror of death, hell, and all opposing might. He bursts the band of death, tramples the power of darkness, and lives forever. Give me the assurance that in Christ I died, in him I rose, in his life I live, in his victory I triumph, in his ascension I shall be glorified. Amen (*Valley of Vision*).